

MARCH 7, 2001

COALITION REINTRODUCES BILL TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HIV/AIDS DRUGS

DENOUNCE ACTIONS BY PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined her colleagues in reintroducing legislation to combat the worldwide HIV/AIDS crisis and promote access to affordable drugs. The Affordable HIV/AIDS Medicines for Poor Countries Act would prohibit the United States government from using trade policy and other measures to block the efforts of developing nations to fight HIV/AIDS. Representatives Maxine Waters (D-CA) is the chief sponsor of the legislation.

□

"I am appalled by the drug industry's thirst for profit and willful neglect of the AIDS pandemic in Africa. That is why in Congress we are leading the effort to save lives in sub Saharan Africa and elsewhere. And as the world's leader, we must set the moral example for other nation's to follow," Schakowsky said.□□

The Affordable HIV/AIDS Medicines for Poor Countries Act would make it illegal for the U.S. government to use the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to prevent any developing country from importing drugs from other countries or producing generic versions on their own. It would also prohibit any agency of the U.S. government from using federal funds to seek to revoke any law or policy of a developing country that promotes access to HIV/AIDS medicines. Furthermore, this bill would require the U.S. to urge the World Trade Organization (WTO) to exempt developing countries from the application of provisions of the TRIPS agreement that restrict their ability to make HIV/AIDS medicines available to their populations at affordable prices.□□

Schakowsky and her colleagues also denounced action by pharmaceutical companies, including an ongoing lawsuit in South Africa to prohibit that nation from implementing a law that would provide millions with affordable drugs. Many people in developing countries have been denied life-saving medicines because they cannot afford to pay the exorbitant prices, which range from \$4,000 to \$20,000 a year. The GNP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa is \$503 per year. Seventy percent of those infected with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa, but the epicenter of this crisis is creeping towards Asia.

"President Bush and his Trade Representative have a responsibility to South Africa and the rest of the world. It should be the policy of this Administration to denounce efforts that limit access to life saving drugs and to attack the AIDS crisis to the fullest extent. Anything less would be unconscionable," Schakowsky said.

After Schakowsky and others criticized U.S. policies of putting politics and profits ahead

of access to affordable HIV/AIDS drugs for nations like South Africa, then President Clinton issued an Executive Order changing U.S. trade policies regarding HIV/AIDS drugs in sub-Saharan Africa.□ The Bush Administration has indicated a willingness to honor that Executive order. However, Schakowsky believes that more must be done.□